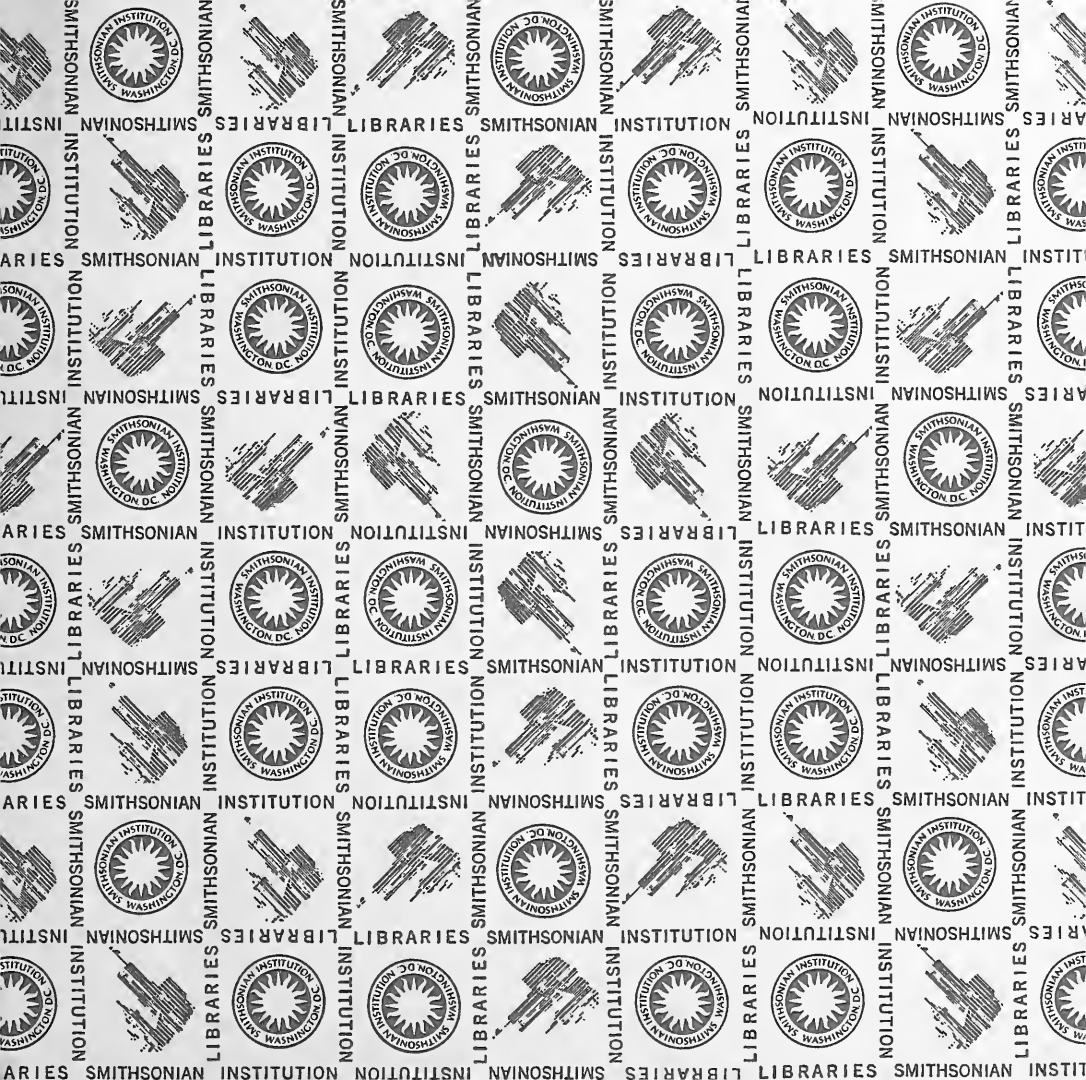


COOPER-HEWITT MUSEUM  
FURNITURE IN THE COLLECTION

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# FURNITURE

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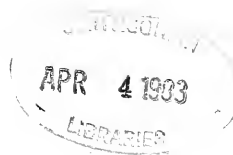
The Smithsonian  
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# FURNITURE

in the Collection of  
the Cooper-Hewitt  
Museum

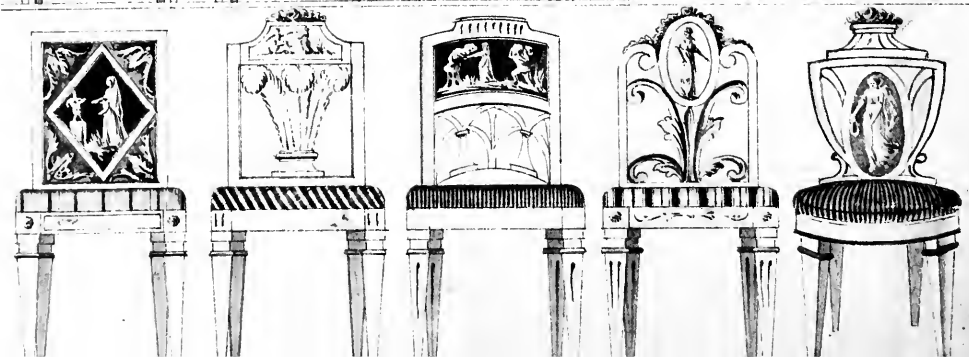
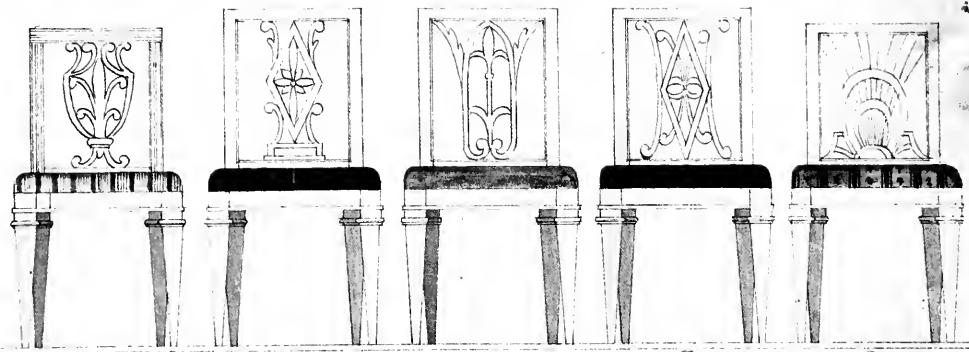
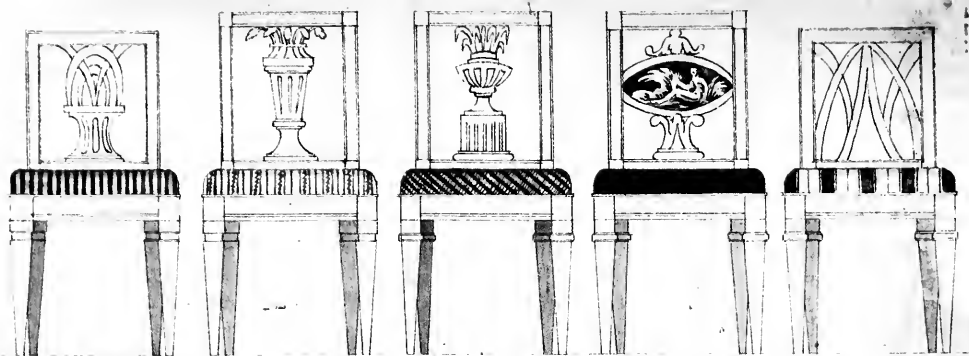


inside cover:

Denis Diderot (1713-1784)  
"Menuisier en meubles, Sieges" from  
*Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné*  
Paris, 1762-72, vol. 7, plate I

Cooper-Hewitt Museum Picture Library

The Smithsonian  
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## FOREWORD

The history of furniture is a record of the continuity of design through changing social patterns and customs. In a certain sense, many of our routine activities, such as sitting, reclining, and conversing, are choreographed by the furniture we use. Thus, the history of furniture gives special insights into the cultural history of mankind. The design and construction of furniture require an impressive knowledge of aesthetics, physics and materials. Throughout history, knowledge and creativity have produced masterpieces of design, innovation, and beauty.

The collection of furniture in the Cooper-Hewitt Museum has been assembled to provide a representative sample of the work of important designers, craftsmen and manufacturers, and to cover a broad spectrum of types and styles. Due to the nature and physical dimensions of these objects, the collection is necessarily selective and discriminating. The Cooper-Hewitt collection is comprised primarily of European furniture from the 17th through the 20th centuries, along with notable American and Oriental examples. All of the examples are significant statements in the history of furniture, and are preserved for the study and enjoyment of present and future generations of Museum visitors.

It is with pleasure that I introduce the Cooper-Hewitt collection of furniture with this publication, made possible with the generous assistance of the Charles E. Merrill Trust.

Lisa Taylor  
*Director*

Germany or Austria  
"Fifteen Side Chairs", about 1805  
Pen and black ink, watercolor

Gift of the Council of the Museum  
1911-28-479



Throughout the long and distinguished history of furniture, a duality of purpose has guided the designer, craftsman, and consumer in the choice of form and decoration of the movable architectural units of interior and exterior space. The most basic purpose, and the most obvious, is the fulfillment of human needs; a chair should be able to support the weight of a human body, a couch or bed must provide horizontal support for rest or sleep, and a cabinet or chest must insure space for the storage of objects. Furniture, with the notable exception of forms such as looking glasses, screens and lighting devices, must provide a support structure which can bear human or inanimate weight. This basic requirement has restricted, to a certain extent, the number of forms which furniture has assumed, in that human activities have changed little over the centuries.

The fascinating variety of designs for furniture that are apparent in any historical survey reflects a second purpose; the choice of materials, ornament, and techniques of construction imbue a simple form with a distinctive and recognizable character, historically labelled a "style." Furniture may thus serve symbolic, aesthetic, and technological purposes which append a temporal and cultural reference to the basic form. It is due to this purpose that the history of furniture is a particularly appropriate resource for the study of cultural history, in that it reflects not only primary usage of a form, but also its secondary interest—a piece of furniture is "personalized" by particular designers, consumers and the process of time.

For example, a chair may play multiple roles, defined by time and place. At one extreme, a chair may be

a throne reserved for a special member of society whose position and authority is emphasized by the appearance of a special chair. At the other end of the spectrum is the simple provincial chair, often designed and made by the user for the facilitation of activities such as sitting at table. A third and distinctive type of chair is the seemingly "ownerless" chair found in public seating accommodations such as parks, airports, and public buildings. In each instance the practical function of the chair has changed little, but its cultural function has changed dramatically.

The constantly changing requirements in the design of furniture over time, the very qualities which make furniture history possible, reflect not only the availability of materials but the conscious choice of materials; not only the technological innovations which have made furniture less expensive or more rapidly produced, but the exploitation of techniques to achieve an aesthetic and practical end; not only the introduction of new styles or revivals of past styles, but the subtle changes in social customs which have made those styles consistent with a larger cultural attitude. In this respect the structural form of furniture and the physical requirements of use which it must fill may be seen as essentially democratic, spanning diverse cultures and periods. The final appearance of the form, the materials used, and the decoration which is integrated into the form may, on the other hand, be highly idiosyncratic.

An example of this distinction may be seen in the use of a common material, such as wood. Wood has figured prominently in furniture design in most historical periods. Wood is usually readily available, it is easily



1. English  
SIDE CHAIR, about 1690  
Walnut, caning  
Gift of Judge Irwin Untermeyer  
1950-4-1

manipulated and shaped with relatively simple tools and processes, and it has great tensile strength and resiliency. The way in which wood is treated, however, indicates distinct aesthetic preferences: a simple fruitwood chair (Fig. 2) emphasizes the strength of the material and the warmth of the polished natural wood; a combination of exotic woods, such as satinwood and tulipwood (Fig. 4a, b) underscores the sophistication, taste and economic status of the owner of the object. Wood may also be denied its natural appearance, being painted entirely (Fig. 3), or gessoed and gilded (Fig. 13). It may be carved (Fig. 1), bent (Fig. 8), laminated (Fig. 7) or even pulverized and reconstructed as papier mâché (Fig. 6).

These distinctive characteristics of design and decoration indicate the special relationship which exists between the designer and craftsman, the choice of materials, and the consumer for whom the furniture is ultimately intended. In each of the examples illustrated, drawn from the Cooper-Hewitt permanent collection, it is possible to recognize several unifying characteristics and concepts which form the basis of furniture history.

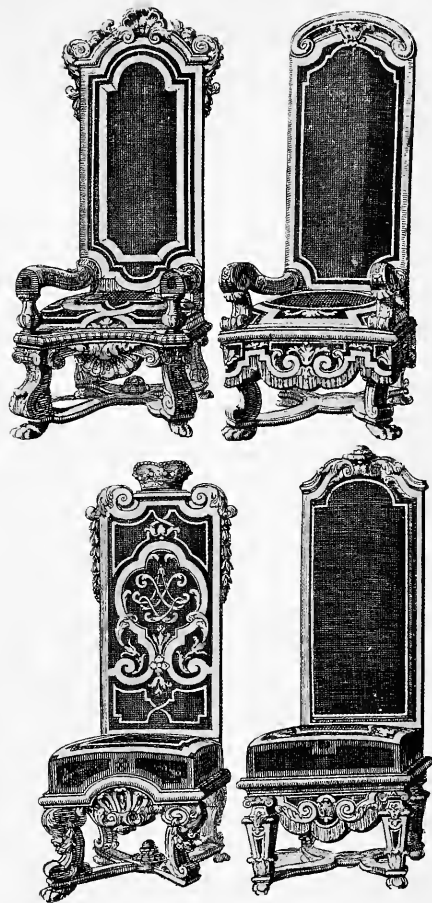
The late 17th century style of furniture in England is exemplified by a tall-backed side chair which dates to the period of William and Mary (Figure 1). The style of the chair, with its fantastic, animated scrolls and attenuated proportions, also reflects the stylistic milieu of the reign of Charles II.

The Restoration of the English monarchy in 1660 set the stage for a brilliant revival of exuberant decoration and ornament that affected nearly all areas of the decorative arts. The monarch, Charles II, along with his exiled

supporters, carried back to England a taste for luxurious baroque forms of French and Dutch inspiration. Outdated furniture forms, generally of oak, and of massive and heavy proportions, were replaced by lighter, elaborately carved and pierced furniture of walnut.

The Cooper-Hewitt chair, although traditional in construction, with four sturdy legs joined by stretchers, reveals a new taste for highly ornamented forms; the side stretchers are lathe-turned as were earlier examples, but the front stretcher is transformed into pure ornament which, in a sense, denies its function. Bold scrolls, shells and voluted foliage are also seen on the profusely carved back frame and cresting. A quest for lightness is indicated by the introduction of caning at the back; this technique of construction had been imported into Europe by way of the East India Companies. Caning reflects not only an innovative material, but the growing popularity of Oriental styles which can be seen throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (See figures 6, 9, 22).

Many designs for furniture produced during this period were derived from the engraved works published by prolific designers such as Daniel Marot (1663–1752). A Huguenot, Marot fled France to escape the religious persecution of Protestants under Louis XIV. Marot secured a position of designer to the court of William of Orange, later William III of England. Arriving in England in 1694, Marot worked as designer at Hampton Court Palace. Although this chair was not designed by Marot, it indicates the general taste of the later years of the 17th century which Marot so ingeniously exploited, and forecasts the resurgence of luxurious furniture forms and the use of new





2. Possibly Swiss or German  
CHAIR, late 17th–early 18th century  
Fruitwood  
Gift of Harvey Smith  
1968–130–12

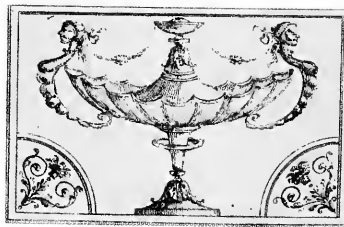
materials and techniques which will continue through the subsequent century.

Complex and highly decorated forms in furniture are often adapted and simplified by provincial craftsmen who skillfully designed and produced furniture for their own use or for the local residents. A side chair (Figure 2) exemplifies the sturdy construction and sound design of provincial furniture. Simple tapered legs are mortised into the gently curved seat slab; attached to the seat is a lively cut and pierced back. The outline of the back is a modified version of a more elaborate seventeenth century chair, upon which extensive carving would have been carried out. Here the basic baroque outline of the back suffices; in combination with the pierced heart pattern, the chair is a prime example of a simple design which achieves great elegance due to the restriction of decoration to a minimum.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century many furniture makers looked toward the ancient world for inspiration for their designs, adapting motifs from Roman architecture and various archaeological sources which could be used for both forms and decoration of chairs, tables and other furniture. This chair (Figure 3) is ornamented with a substantial repertoire of neo-classical motifs, including addorsed eagles' heads, bellflowers and a ribbed tent motif which forms the back of the chair. The gracefully curved legs are joined to the frame with acanthus leaves, and at each corner of the seat are oval paterae.

The style of the chair is similar to designs published by Michelangelo Pergolesi, a prolific designer of ornament who was active in Italy and later in England. Pergolesi was brought to London at the request of Robert





Michaelangelo Pergolesi  
Italy and England  
"Designs for various ornaments, etc."  
(1777-1792)  
from *Eighteenth Century Architectural  
Ornamentation*...  
N.Y., G. H. Polley & Co., 1900  
Cooper-Hewitt Museum Picture Library



3. Probably Italian  
SIDE CHAIR, late 18th century  
Carved, polychromed, gilded wood  
Gift of Countess Costantini  
1924-6-1

4a,b. Attributed to William Moore, active 1782–1815  
 Dublin, Ireland  
 SIDE TABLE (one of a pair), about 1785–1790  
 Satinwood, tulipwood and other inlays  
 Gift of Neil Sellin  
 1967–87–1

Adam, the Scottish architect whose distinctive style has become nearly synonymous with English neo-classicism. In addition to working for Adam, Pergolesi produced a series of prints issued under the title of *Designs for various ornaments, etc.*, released over a period of several years from 1777 through 1801. In these prints Pergolesi included designs for interior decoration, ceilings, urns, metalwork, and furniture. Many of Pergolesi's decorative schemes were derived from Renaissance sources, including the grotesques of Raphael. These filigreed constructions of stylized foliage, architectural elements, figures, and animals formed a design vocabulary rich in variety. The design for this chair is not derived directly from any of Pergolesi's prints, but certainly shares the imaginative and fantastic quality of his work.

The idea of "truth to materials" which forms one stream of aesthetic thought during the 19th and 20th centuries was less appealing to the eighteenth; the wood from which this chair was constructed has been entirely covered with polychrome colors and gilding, providing a luxurious surface and brilliant color unrelated to the basic material of construction.

The geometric simplicity and uninterrupted surfaces of many neo-classical designs for furniture gave cabinetmakers ample opportunity to lavish exotic veneers and inlays on the forms. A side table, (Figure 4a,b) veneered primarily with satinwood, has inlaid patterns of garlands, urns, honeysuckle and bellflowers covering the entire surface of the piece. The table top is also distinguished by a delicately shaded fan motif at the back and an arabesque of

vines and flowers secured by a curled and ruffled ribbon bow.

The quality of the inlay work and the similarity of the designs to other attributed examples, suggest that the table may have been produced in the workshops of William Moore, a distinguished late-18th century cabinetmaker based in Dublin. Moore set up a business in that city in 1783, following a period of work with the well-known firm of Ince and Mayhew. A May 1782 advertisement in the *Dublin Evening Post* provides an insight into the work of William Moore, who

"most respectfully acknowledges the encouragement he has received, begs leave to inform those who may want Inlaid work, that by his close attention to business and instructions to his men, he has brought the manufacture to such perfection, to be able to sell for almost one half his original prices; as the greatest demand is for Pier-Tables, he has just finished in the newest taste a great variety of patterns, sizes and prices, from three guineas to twenty; Card tables on a new construction (both ornamented and plain) which appear like small Pier-Tables, with every article in the inlaid Way, executed on shortest notice, and hopes from his long experience at Messrs. Mayhew & Ince, London, his remarkable fine coloured woods, and elegant finished work, to meet the approbation of all who shall please to honour him with their commands."

David Roentgen (1743–1807) has been called the most successful cabinet maker in Europe during the 18th century. This is an apposite comment, for not only did Roentgen supply the courts of Europe with *de luxe* furniture, including distinguished clients like Catherine the Great of Russia, but he created an international market for his designs (Figure 5). Roentgen furniture was sought after



in Paris and London as well as in Russia; Roentgen directed one of the most competent and prolific workshops in the latter years of the 18th century.

Among the most appealing aspects of Roentgen's work, above and beyond the quality of material and the superb craftsmanship which he maintained in his shop, is Roentgen's interest and inventiveness in the design of furniture incorporating mechanical gadgets and devices. While working for the French court, Roentgen was appointed "*ébéniste-mécanicien du Roi et de la Reine*," a dual role of furniture maker and mechanical inventor appropriate to his talents. For Louis XVI, Roentgen made a writing desk that contained both a music box and a clock; for other clients he made various pieces of furniture which boasted secret compartments and drawers, often operated by a push-button.

The Cooper-Hewitt architect's table, when closed, appears to be an ordinary desk. However, the top is hinged at one side to permit the desk surface to become a drafting board or book rest. The mahogany veneered side of the table ingeniously pulls out to form a drawer for storage. The drawer itself contains a leather-covered writing surface, three inner rear drawers, and two sliding covered drawers at the front, one of which is compartmented and may be pulled out through the side of the large drawer.

Roentgen's design reiterates the special combination of function and form that distinguishes great pieces of furniture. In its clarity of form and adaptability to changing situations, the Roentgen desk is not unlike 20th century modular furniture that has multiple usage built into the design. However, during the 18th century, the requirement of multiple usage was a less persuasive factor in the choice of a design than the cleverness it implied.



5. Attributed to David Roentgen (1743-1807)  
 Neuwied, Germany  
 ARCHITECT'S TABLE, about 1780-1795  
 Mahogany, wood, gilt bronze, leather  
 Anonymous gift  
 1952-160-1

Materials used for the construction of furniture have sometimes included unusual substances. This chair (Figure 6), of English origin, was made in the middle decades of the 19th century when papier mâché was used for the production of chairs, tables and trays. Papier mâché, composed of paper mashed to the consistency of pulp, could be molded with or without an internal support; when dried the material was surprisingly strong, inexpensive and malleable. The surface of papier mâché furniture was most frequently painted to resemble black lacquer, and decoration often included stencilled or free-hand gilded ornament, as well as inlays of exotic materials.

The Museum chair has a single piece curved back with scalloped edges; the chair is supported at the front with cabriole legs typical of 19th century rococo revival style. A lingering fascination with the exotic and luxurious crafts of the East is suggested by the lustrous black finish and the richly inlaid mother-of-pearl patterns.

Papier mâché retained its popularity for several decades in the 19th century, but unavoidable structural weakness of the objects rendered it less appealing than other materials such as the traditionally favored wood, and newer materials like cast iron. Among the firms that specialized in the production of fine papier mâché furniture was the English manufacturer Jennens and Bettridge. This firm showed its virtuoso pieces constructed of the material at the 1851 Crystal Palace exhibition. Another firm, Peyton and Harlow, credited the innovative medium of papier mâché by showing at the same exhibition "Patent improved metallic bedsteads japanned to correspond with papier-mâché furniture exhibited by Jennens and



6. English  
CHAIR, about 1845-1850  
Papier mâché, paint, gilding, mother-of-pearl  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Wiesenberger  
1967-66-1

Bettridge." Since many furniture designs were patented during the 19th century, a patent mark on a piece of furniture carried a certain authority and guaranteed the origin and quality of manufacture. Other rival firms, lacking the patent, were not above simple forgery; this chair has at the back an imitation of a patent registry mark.

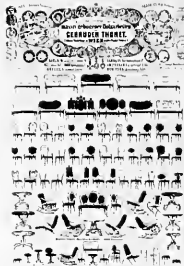
Significant technological advances during the 19th century stimulated the production of furniture forms which would have been virtually impossible prior to the development of sophisticated machinery and processes. Among the numerous techniques of manipulating wood which were introduced during the middle years of the 19th century, one of the most familiar is the lamination of wood, (Figure 7) in which the structure of the piece is produced from wood glued together in thin layers to give added strength to the fiber, and thus permit elaborate piercing.

The name most frequently associated with this process is John Henry Belter (1804-1863), who arrived in New York in 1844 and set up a furniture workshop on Broadway. In 1856 Belter applied for a patent for his lamination process, which could include from 3 to 16 layers of wood. Rosewood, a 19th century favorite, is a wood which does not have particular strength when carved from a solid piece. However, if several layers of this wood are placed together with the grain of each layer perpendicular to those at either side, the increase in strength is dramatic.

The Belter style is related superficially to rococo examples of the 18th century. The phenomenon of the rococo revival was, in a sense, an attempt to recreate for



7. American  
New York  
SIDE CHAIR, mid-19th century  
Laminated and carved rosewood and oak  
Gift of Mrs. Edwin Gould  
1937-4-2



Gebrüder Thonet  
Vienna, Austria  
ADVERTISEMENT SHEET  
Vienna Exhibition, 1873  
Cooper-Hewitt Museum  
Picture Library



8. Michael Thonet (1796-1871)  
Thonet factories  
Vienna, Austria  
SIDE CHAIR, late 19th century  
Beech  
Purchase in memory of Erskine Hewitt  
1969-133-2

the affluent middle class the luxury of the *ancien régime*. As part of a series of revivals current in the 19th century, furniture produced in this manner combined the latest technology with a somewhat traditional taste.

A parallel innovation in furniture design and fabrication occurred in the 19th century in Europe. Among the designers who achieved both international renown and a lasting place in the history of furniture, Michael Thonet holds a position of authority. Born in the village of Boppard on the Rhine in 1796, Thonet was apprenticed as a youth to a carpenter. This background led Thonet to experiment with various processes in his own furniture workshop to produce strong, quality pieces of simple design utilizing mechanical processes to maintain low cost and efficiency of production (Figure 8). The high costs of furniture production were directly related to the fact that arms and legs of most chairs and sofas were composed of curves which had to be laboriously and wastefully carved from a solid piece of wood. Alternatively, curved members could be produced by joining two or more pieces of wood together; however, this reduced the strength of the piece.

Thonet experimented with steam and heat as a softening agent on strips of wood which could then be bent into a predetermined shape; when dried, these curved pieces of laminate would retain both their shape and strength. Further experimentation made it possible, through the use of strong metal straps and forms, to bend and twist solid segments of wood into the desired shape. Since the grain of the wood, which provides the tensile strength, is not interrupted by cutting, these pieces of furniture were extremely strong, light and resilient to wear.



Thonet's furniture was immediately popular, and used in both private and public interiors due to the low price of production which the manufacturer could maintain with simple methods of mass production and his use of readily available materials. Thonet's chairs and sofas, and his well-known rocking chairs, are surprisingly "modern" in appearance in the midst of 19th century elaboration and have become classics in the history of furniture design.

An earlier variation in the manipulation of wood through bending and shaping the structural members of seating furniture is exemplified in this early 19th century Chinese chair (Figure 9), presumably produced for export to the West. Considerable amounts of bamboo furniture were imported into both Europe and America during the early 19th century; notable additions to the Royal Pavilion at Brighton included the Prince Regent's choice of bamboo chairs for his seaside pleasure palace.

Not only was the material used for the construction of this type of furniture inexpensive and available, it carried with it the exotic and evocative flavor of the mysterious East. The patterns filling the interstices of the structure, in their delicacy and complexity, suggest the refinements of Oriental fretwork. This chair is entirely constructed of bamboo, save for the caned seat. The structural portions of the chair are submerged in a network of bamboo frames within which are suspended the split bamboo patterns.

Louis Comfort Tiffany commented on the bamboo furniture made for export to the West, stating that it was "... exceedingly light, pretty, and ... very cheap.



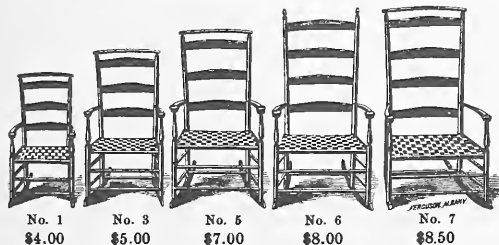
9. Chinese, probably for export  
ARMCHAIR, early 19th century  
Bamboo  
Gift of Mrs. William Pedlar  
1962-75-1



10. American  
Shaker workshop, Mt. Lebanon, New York  
ROCKING CHAIR, 1878-1910  
Maple  
Gift of Mrs. Jacob Kaplan  
1968-102-1

**The Shakers' Slat Back Chairs, with Arms and Rockers.**

WORSTED LACE SEATS.



**The Shakers' Slat Back Chairs, with Rockers.**

WORSTED LACE SEATS.

From a catalogue of Shaker Furniture,  
probably late 19th century  
Cooper-Hewitt Museum Picture Library

The stouter parts or framework is colored dark . . . The young shoots of the plant are interwoven with those of stouter growth in pretty windings and book cases, tables, sofas, and chairs are thus produced at small cost."

The luxurious rosewood rococo fantasies and exotic materials so popular in the furniture design repertoire of the 19th century stand in distinct and striking contrast to the furniture produced in the workshops of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming, a group of zealous and determined ascetics popularly known as "Shakers" (Figure 10).

A principle of Shaker belief was that simplicity and uniformity were manifestations of perfection; the quality of one's inner life was reflected not only in the behavior patterns of the individual, but also in the necessary objects of daily life. Shaker furniture exemplifies the ideal of simple and functional design, purity of form, and soundness of construction. Restrained ornamentation and an aversion to unnecessary decoration make Shaker furniture, exemplified by this rocking chair produced at the Mount Lebanon community, a stunningly "modern" combination of form and function.

Each of the Shaker communities were united internally but clearly separate from the world at large, both in belief and behavior. They did, however, develop specializations in manufacturing and in the production of various handicrafts which provided an income for the community. While the Canterbury community produced washing machines and mangles, the Mount Lebanon group was renowned for its chairs and published a sale catalogue which included available patterns and prices.

The Shaker style was not a self-conscious attempt to achieve an aesthetic ideal, but grew from the conviction that simplicity was inherently beautiful. Shaker furniture, designed and crafted with function holding primary place in the inspiration, documents the group's respect for sound labor and integrity of purpose.

During the latter decades of the 19th century a self-conscious and intentional rejection of the myriad revival styles popular during the century occurred among designers of furniture and other decorative arts in France, Italy, Germany, Scandinavia and other major centers of design. The style, based upon abstract organic forms was known as art nouveau. The name assumed for the entire movement in France was derived from a sales gallery which featured the work of these innovative designers opened in 1895 by Samuel Bing. Art nouveau furniture, in which sinuous, asymmetric and complex organic forms were transformed into recognizable objects, had many champions. Both French and Italian designers working in this style are represented in the Cooper-Hewitt collection.

In France, the works of Hector Guimard, Emile Gallé and Louis Majorelle are among the most refined and sophisticated. Hector Guimard (1867-1942), like many furniture designers, was also a respected architect. Guimard, a student at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, entered practice in 1888. Although traditionally trained in the styles of the past, Guimard assiduously strived to create a style that expressed a contemporary aesthetic, based upon the study of natural forms and the patterns of growth. Guimard's work embodies these principles in abstract form. Originally used in Guimard's own dining room, this chair (Figure 11) displays a sinuosity of outline that suggests by its swelling forms the world of nature. Guimard also stressed the natural beauty of wood in many of his furniture forms; the smooth polished fruitwood used for the construction of the chair evokes a warmth of material consistent with the movement of the structural members.

Emile Gallé (1846-1904), like Guimard, extended his vision of abstract organic design to many areas of the decorative arts, including glass and furniture. Gallé was apprenticed as a youth at a glass factory; later, he travelled to London where he fell under the pervasive influence of imported Eastern decorative arts, particularly Oriental glass. Gallé became famous for his delicately cut and etched overlay glass inspired by Chinese examples. His designs for glass illustrate a curious blending of Eastern refinement with European technology — by 1890 Gallé



11. Hector Guimard (1867-1942)  
France  
SIDE CHAIR, 1908  
Cherry  
Gift of Madame Hector Guimard  
1948-114-1

was manufacturing enormous quantities of his unique cased glass vessels. During the 1880's Gallé turned his fertile imagination to furniture design (Figure 12), specializing in organic patterns somewhat more literal than those by Guimard; many Gallé pieces were enhanced by luxurious inlays of exotic woods. This chair, diminutive in size, is typical of the refinement of Gallé's designs in the art nouveau taste.

Louis Majorelle (1859-1926), the third of the great art nouveau masters of furniture design in France represented in the Museum collections, was born into a family



12. Emile Gallé (1846-1904)  
France  
SIDE CHAIR, about 1893  
Walnut, various inlays  
Gift of Mrs. Jefferson Patterson  
1979-54-1



13. Probably Louis Majorelle (1859-1926)  
France  
SIDE CHAIR, part of a suite, about 1910  
Gilded wood, silk needlepoint  
Gift of Mrs. Peter J. Perry  
1969-71-3

cabinetmaking business. Trained as a painter, Majorelle studied with Millet. By 1879 he had assumed his father's furniture business, but it was not until the final years of the 19th century that Majorelle began working in the art nouveau taste popularized by Guimard and Gallé. By the early years of the 20th century Majorelle's factory was the most successful and prolific producer of art nouveau furniture in all Europe. The furniture attributed to the Majorelle workshop in the Museum collection comprises an impressive suite of side chairs, arm chairs and settee, in an extremely restrained art nouveau design with delicately

curved reeded legs and backs. In their lightness and elegance, these pieces suggest the furniture styles of the period of Louis XV. Each piece is upholstered in contemporary silk needlepoint in delicate pastel colors. Although the frames of this suite are gilded, Majorelle viewed the material of his furniture — carved wood — as the means of achieving a sculptural unity of form, construction and ornament. Majorelle stated that “... wood provides agreeable sensations for an *ébéniste*: like a flower it allures by its scent, charms by its color, ravishes the eye by the pattern of its rich arabesques . . . .”



14. Eugenio Quarti (1867–1931)  
Italy  
VITRINE TABLE, about 1901–1902  
Mahogany, various wood inlays, glass  
Gift of Signora Marie-Louise Wanner Quarti  
1977–47–1

Italian designers of the latter years of the 19th century achieved a synthesis of form and material, of function and luxury, in most ways comparable to French trendsetters. The works of two of the leaders in the Italianate version of art nouveau (called “stile Liberty”) are represented in the Cooper-Hewitt collection. The designs of Eugenio Quarti and Carlo Zen are unusually fine examples of this stylistic movement, as well as of their personal and unique characteristics.

Eugenio Quarti (1867–1931) travelled as a young man to Paris, returning to Milan in 1888. Upon his return he was taken on in the workshops of the famous Carlo Bugatti. By the turn of the century, Quarti was working independently, and showed with great success at the first international exposition of decorative and modern art in Turin in 1902. Quarti’s version of organically-inspired art nouveau designs are distinguished by the overall solidity and clarity of his forms; decoration of Quarti furniture is severely disciplined and understated. On the vitrine table

in the Museum collection (Figure 14) the decorative elements are kept to a minimum, carefully subjugated to the overall structural design. Delicate inlaid patterns at the outer edges of the major planar surfaces and equally reticent carved decoration at the base of each leg express the refinement of Quarti’s design.

The exuberance and lush sensuality of French art nouveau is more closely approximated in the work of Carlo Zen (active 1898–1902). A writing desk and chair by Zen are in the Museum collection (Figures 15, 16); both are similarly designed to emphasize the sinuous linearity of the wooden structure, with exaggerated and attenuated legs enriched with delicate inlay. The inlay work on most Zen furniture is particularly noteworthy; exceedingly fine meandering vine patterns of brass are contrasted with white metal and lustrous mother-of-pearl. The delicacy of the inlay is immediately reminiscent of Japanese lacquer and inlaid work, from which many of Zen’s designs were adapted.



15. Carlo Zen (active 1898-1902)  
Italy  
DESK, 1902  
Fruitwood, brass, white metal, mother-of-pearl  
Gift of John Goodwin  
1963-29-1



16. Probably Carlo Zen (active 1898-1902)  
Italy  
CHAIR, about 1900  
Fruitwood, brass, white metal, mother-of-pearl  
Gift of Donald Vlack  
1971-49-1

20th century furniture design brings together many of the disparate threads which make up the history of furniture during the previous centuries. Concern with functionalism, the influence of the machine and the resultant preoccupation with the relationship between the designer and the factory, the introduction of new materials and processes of fabrication, and the interplay of architectural space, interior design and the furnishings of public and domestic space — those very issues which concerned 19th century furniture designers — continue into the present century. However, a tendency to combine the role of architect and furniture designer becomes even more apparent in the 20th century. The Cooper-Hewitt collection contains several fine examples of the work of modern architect-designers that individually and collectively express both the problems and potential solutions to the design questions posed by contemporary society.

A convenient link between 19th century technology and 20th century design is seen in a chair (Figure 17) by Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956). Hoffmann was born in Moravia and studied at the Academy, was a co-founder of the Vienna Secession, and in 1903 founded the *Wiener Werkstätte* with Koloman Moser. Around 1904–05, Hoffmann was commissioned to design the furniture for the Purkersdorf sanatorium; the Cooper-Hewitt chair is one of those produced for the dining room of the institution. Hoffmann's design included tapered bent wood as the primary structural feature. The chairs were produced at the factory of the Thonet Brothers, who had already earned a distinguished reputation for the production of steamed and bent wood (see Figure 8). Hoffmann's design



17. Designed by Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956)  
Manufactured by Thonet Brothers  
Vienna, Austria  
DINING ROOM CHAIR, for the  
Purkersdorf sanatorium, 1903–1906  
Beechwood, leather  
Purchased with combined funds and  
a Gift from Crane and Company  
1968–6–1





18. Marcel Breuer (born 1902)  
Germany  
ARMCHAIR, 1925  
Metal tubing, canvas  
Gift of Gary Laredo  
1956-10-1

is straightforward and highly functional for public use; the sturdy legs are given additional support by wooden spheres attached at the juncture of seat and leg. Along with a perforated back slat, the chair expresses Hoffmann's self-declared philosophy of integral design:

"We wish to create an inner relationship linking public, designer and worker and we want to produce good and simple articles of everyday use. Our guiding principle is function, utility our first condition, and our strength must lie in good proportions and the proper treatment of material. We shall seek to decorate when it seems required but we do not feel obligated to adorn at any price."

—Joseph Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, *The Work-Programme of the Wiener Werkstätte*, 1905.

A comparable aesthetic, in that it stressed the close relationships between design, craftsmanship, func-

tion and beauty, was expressed by the prolific and influential designer Marcel Breuer. Born in 1902 in Hungary, Breuer studied at the Bauhaus, the all-encompassing academy of modern design founded by Walter Gropius in 1919 at Weimar. At the Bauhaus, Breuer studied carpentry, and in 1925 he headed the cabinetmaking workshop there. Breuer's experiments with woodworking were soon superseded by an interest in furniture designs which could be fabricated in metal. Although Breuer was not the sole inventor of the bent tubular steel chair, his classic of 1925 (Figure 18) in the Museum collection exemplifies the solution to many problems which concerned the designer. Bent tubular steel was strong, light in weight, easily machine-produced, and maintained the spatial integrity of modern architectural interiors.



19. Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959)  
American  
SIDE CHAIR, about 1935, designed about 1920  
Oak, fabric  
Gift of Tetsuzo Inumaru  
1968-137-1

The American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) also designed furniture from an architectural point of view, although frequently relying on more traditional materials such as wood for his constructions. A chair by Wright in the Museum collection (Figure 19) was designed for use in the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, Japan; designs for the hotel were begun by Wright in 1915, and by 1922 the hotel was completed. Wright's interest in the unity of immovable space and movable objects demanded that he be responsible for the entire design of the complex, including the furniture, textiles and dishes. Wright's chair is based on the geometric principle of the hexagon and octagon, and carries out this theme in variation at the upholstered back and the complex system of supports.

Luxury has not been overlooked in 20th century design, in spite of the fact that many modern designs rely on severe geometric forms and metallic surfaces. During the 1920s and 1930s several designers returned to rather exotic materials, often used in combination with extremely refined geometric forms. The work of Jean Dunand (1877-1942), in the "art deco" style (Figure 20), includes the use of lacquer and crushed eggshell on his geometrically conceived forms.

Classics in modern design are the thoughtful and carefully considered combination of genius and understanding of technological potential. Few designers have married these two concerns more elegantly and gracefully than Charles Eames (1907-1978). Eames has been called the first American furniture designer of international significance, a reputation which was earned through conscientious design principles and practice. Eames, like so many



20. Jean Dunand (1877-1942)  
France  
TABLE, about 1930  
Wood, lacquer, eggshell  
Gift of Rodman A. Heeren  
1969-156-5



21. Charles Eames (1907–1978)  
American  
CHILD'S CHAIR, 1944  
Laminated birch  
Gift of Mrs. R. Wallace Bowman  
1969–117–1

other 20th century furniture designers, was trained as an architect, and studied for a time at the Cranbrook Academy. In 1939 Eames was employed in the office of the Finnish-American architect Eliel Saarinen. Along with Saarinen's son, Eero, Eames designed, for a Museum of Modern Art competition, the first of many prize-winning designs. Eames was acutely aware of the possibilities of utilizing new materials such as plastics, as well as superior machine techniques for forming and shaping metal, wood and other materials. Several of his early experiments with wood included the forming of seating units from laminated sheets of wood (Figure 21); one recalls the similar use of this material in the work of 19th century furniture makers such as John Henry Belter (Figure 7). However, in Eames' designs, the structure of the object is never divorced from its clarity of function; even the pierced heart motif at the back of the chair doubles as an ornamental punctuation mark and an easily grasped handle for lifting the lightweight chair.

Designers in the 20th century have not forgotten their debt to the past in their search for appropriate contemporary designs. A final grace note to this brief introduction to the Cooper-Hewitt collection is seen in the 1944 armchair designed by the influential Danish designer Hans Wegner (Figure 22). The simplicity of form, lack of ostentation of surface treatment, obvious comfort, stability and gracefulness in appearance are typical of the finest 20th century designs. Wegner, however, adapted this chair design from similar examples produced in China during the Ming dynasty. As in the history of most decorative

arts, the past may be viewed as a burden which must be borne by designers; however, in the hands of creative artists, designers and craftsmen, the past provides the context for continuity and change. The examination of that context, and the creation of untold variations at once new and traditional, is the fundamental role of both the designer and any museum which seeks to preserve that past for future enjoyment and education.

**David Revere McFadden**

*Curator of Decorative Arts*

22. Hans J. Wegner (born 1914)  
Denmark  
ARMCHAIR, 1944  
Cherry, leather  
Gift of Fritz Hansen, Inc.  
1971-17-1



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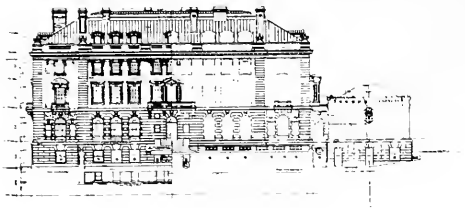
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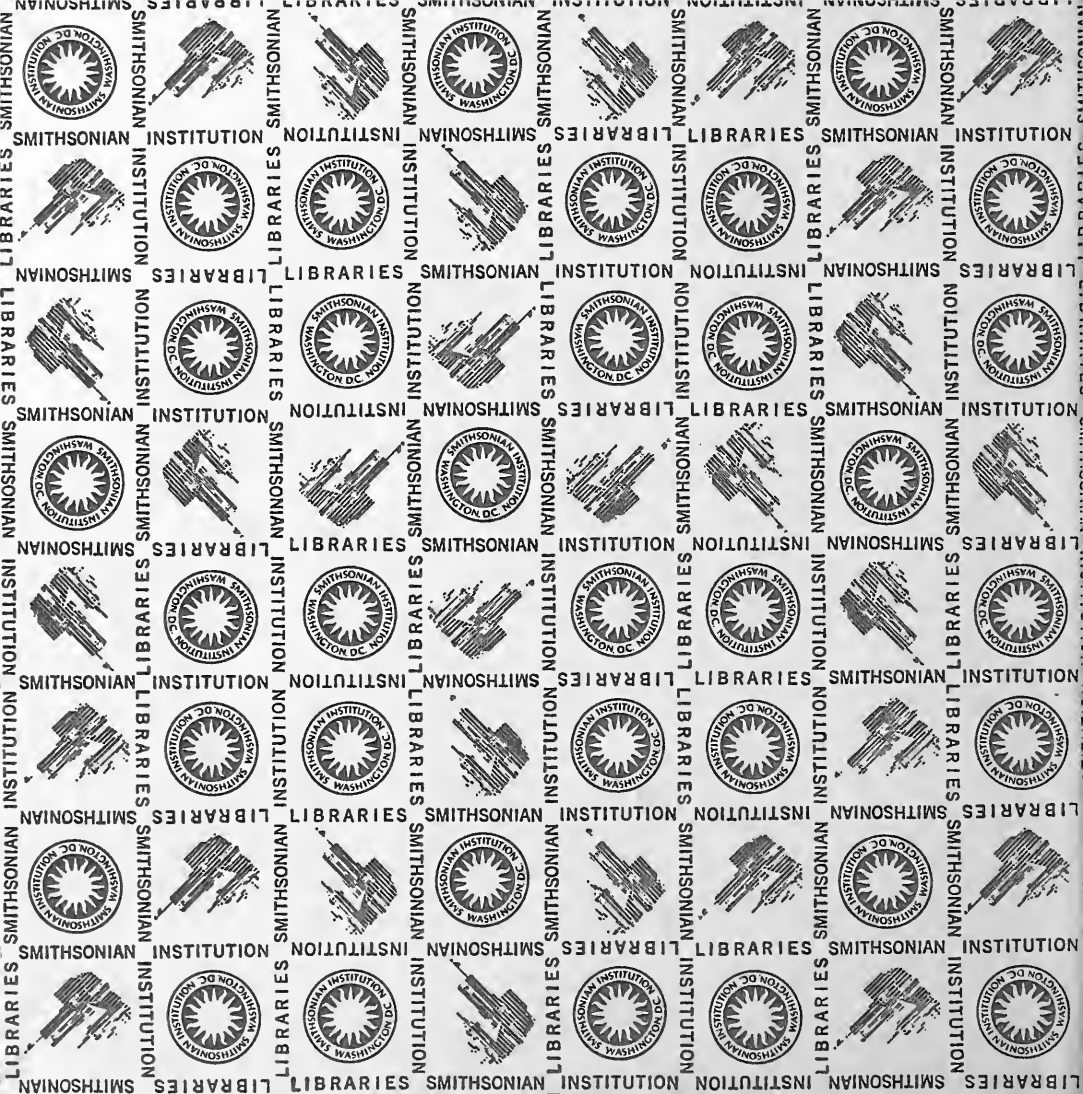


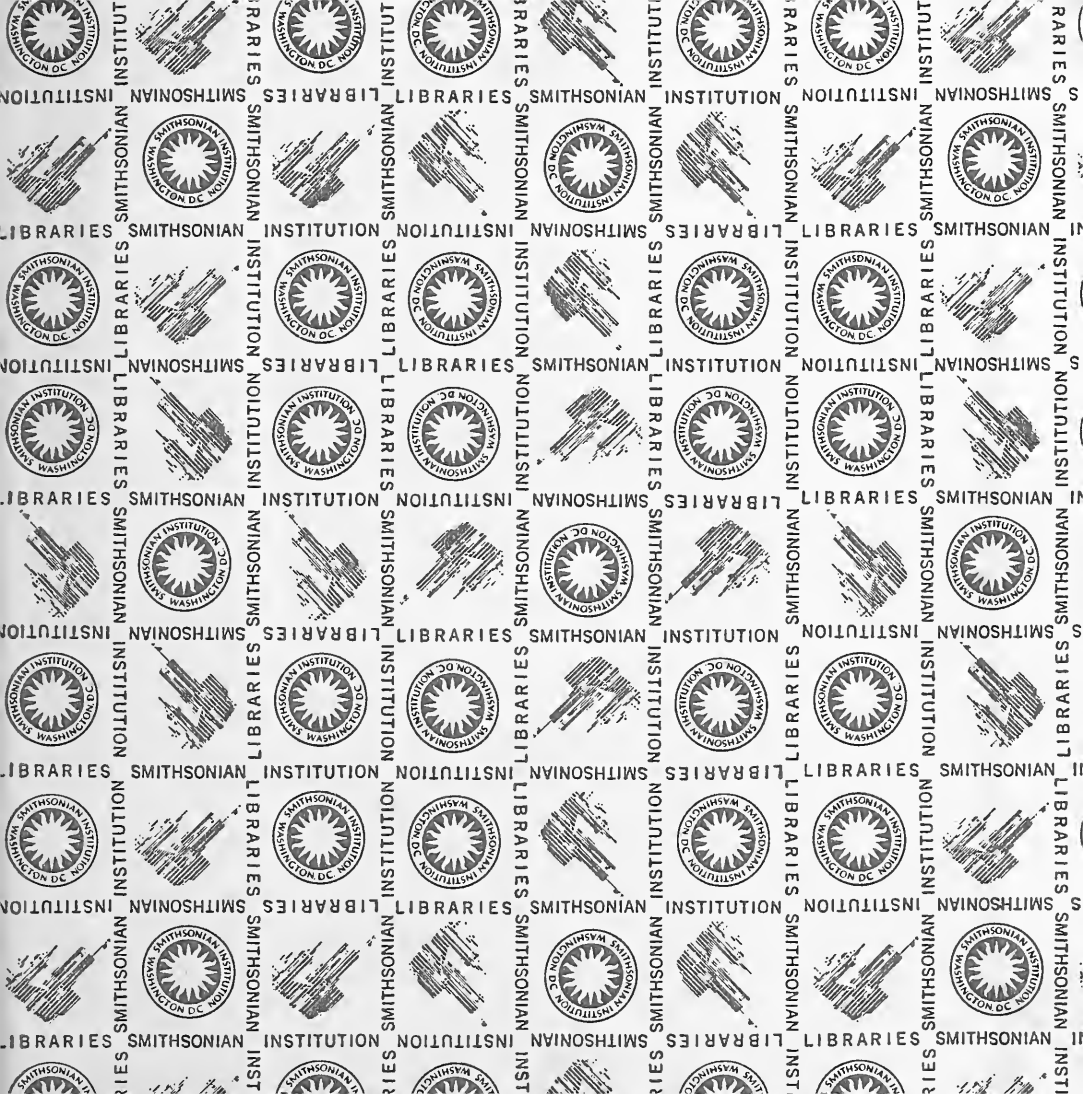
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